

# Oriental Ceramics and Chinese Porcelain from a Portuguese Indiaman, the presumable *Nossa Senhora dos Mártires* (Tagus River, Portugal)

## Introduction and archaeological works

This work, developed under the Master thesis project of the authress, had as main objective the study of the ceramic assemblage found at the archaeological site of São Julião da Barra, located between Oeiras and Cascais (Lisbon, Portugal), at the mouth of the Tagus River (Fig. 1). This ceramics assemblage and other remains, among which stands out some pepper grains, has frequently been associated to the cargo brought aboard the *Nossa Senhora dos Mártires* Portuguese Indiaman, that sailed from Cochín, on January 1606, and sank near to the São Julião da Barra Fortress on 14 September 1606 (Castro, 2001).

The site was surveyed and excavated between 1994 and 2000 by a CNANS team, allowing the identification of different archaeological sites, including several pieces belonging to the hull of a ship.

On this area, named as São Julião da Barra 2 (SJB2) and located at South/Southeast of the fortress, several fragments of plates, bowls and bottles of Chinese porcelain were found – most of them known as kraakporcelain from the Ming Dynasty, Wanli Kingdom (1573-1619) –, as well as oriental jars and a large quantity of peppercorns between the joints of the planking, scattered throughout the archaeological site (Alves, 1994).

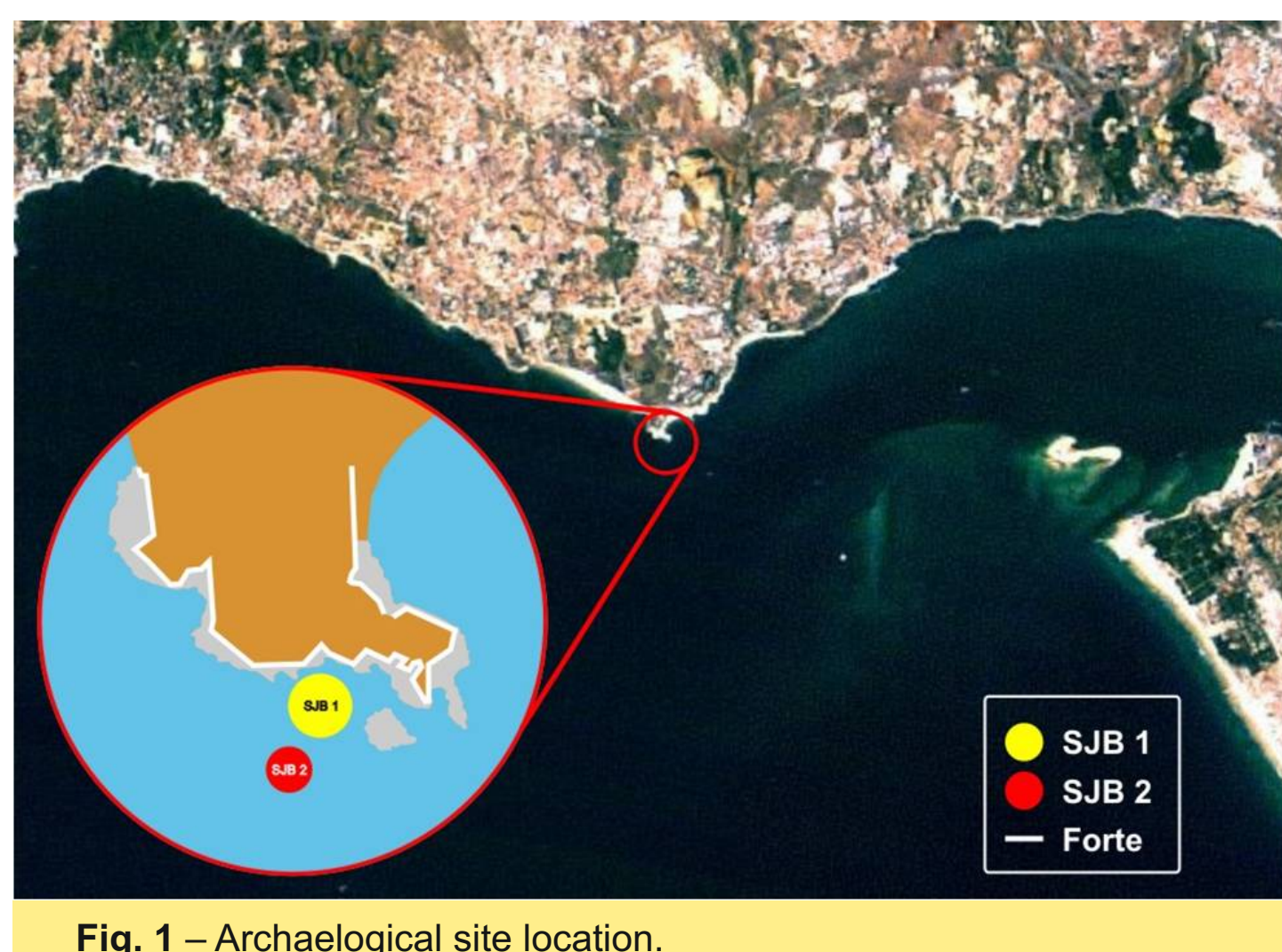


Fig. 1 – Archaeological site location.

## The collection

The ceramic collection is a significant part of the remains found on this archaeological site, although the present study refers only to the analyses of the oriental ceramics comprising 240 fragments, which results into 139 jars and 101 fragments of Chinese porcelain (Fig. 2).

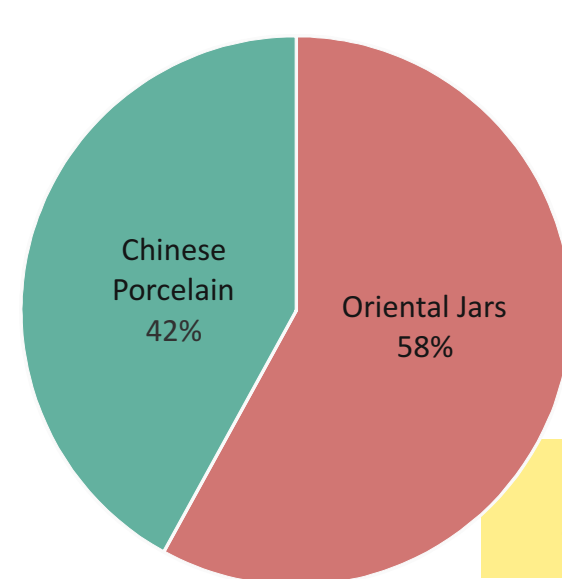


Fig. 2 – Statistical analyses for the ceramic collection.



Fig. 3 – Asian jars aboard, as represented on a XVI century Japanese folding screen (Pinto, 1986: 32).

### Oriental Jars

These containers were used to store liquids and solids and also as a form of packaging suitable for transport goods abroad (Fig. 3).

The collection from SJB can be divided into five categories:

Group I – *Martaban* jars (32 fragments); Group II – *Tradescant* jars (32 fragments); Group III – Other Chinese productions (52 fragments); Group IV – *Tai* stoneware jars (1 piece) and Group V – *Tsubo* jars (1 piece). The collection also includes 19 fragments of undetermined jars (Fig. 4 and 5)

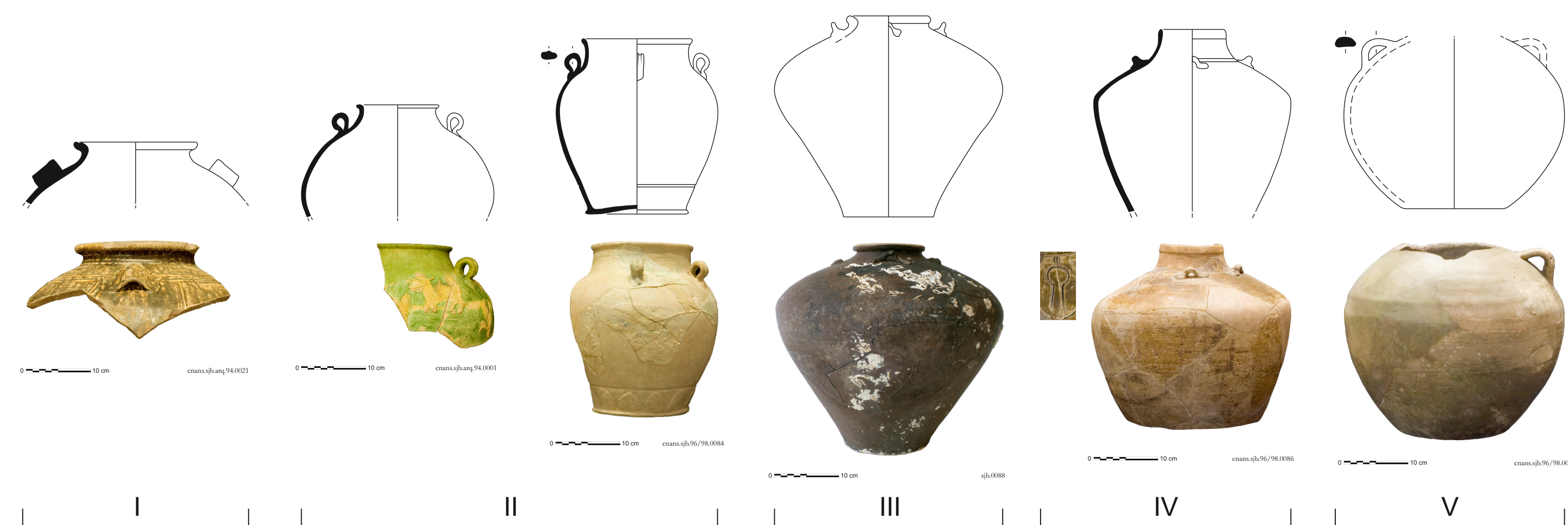


Fig. 5 – Oriental jars.

### Chinese Porcelain

The porcelain includes open forms – such as dishes and bowls – and closed containers – cups, jars and bottles.

They can be divided into two distinct categories:

Group I – White porcelain decorated with blue cobalt beneath the glaze (10 fragments) and Group II – *Kraakporcelain* (74 fragments). We have also 17 fragments of undetermined porcelains (Fig. 6).

#### Group I – White porcelain decorated with blue cobalt beneath the glaze

This first group includes jars produced in white porcelain decorated in shades of blue cobalt beneath the glaze, dated from the Ming dynasty, in particular the Wanli Kingdom. Despite having a deep blue shade, is possible to visualize a tickening of the ceramic clays compared with the productions of previous kingdoms. In this group we identified pots (Fig. 7). Some pieces are decorated in the bulge, formed by branches of a pine tree, herons flicking between branches and the image of a monkey perched upon a branch. This Taoist iconography – crows, cliffs and pine trees – is characteristic of the Wanli creations, from the Jingdezhen workshops, in the Jiangxi province (Fig. 8)

Fig. 6 – Statistical analyses for the Chinese porcelain.

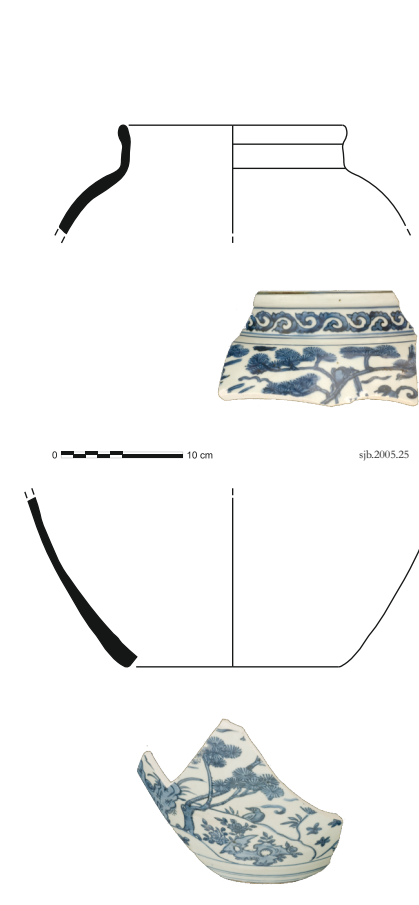
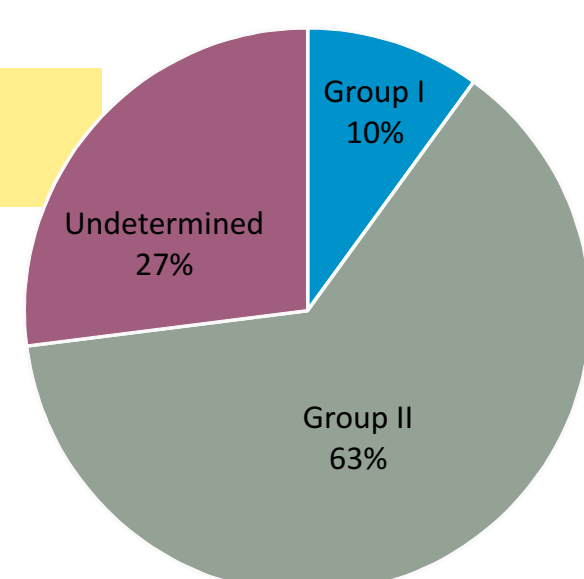


Fig. 7 – Pots of Chinese porcelain.



Fig. 8 – Still life. Willem Kalf, 1669.

### Group II - Kraakporcelain

These porcelain fragments have a delicate body, lightly and sonorous, and both surfaces coated with a very bright glaze – dishes with flattened rims, dishes with strait rims, bowls/cups with flattened rims, bottles and jars (Fig. 9 and 10).

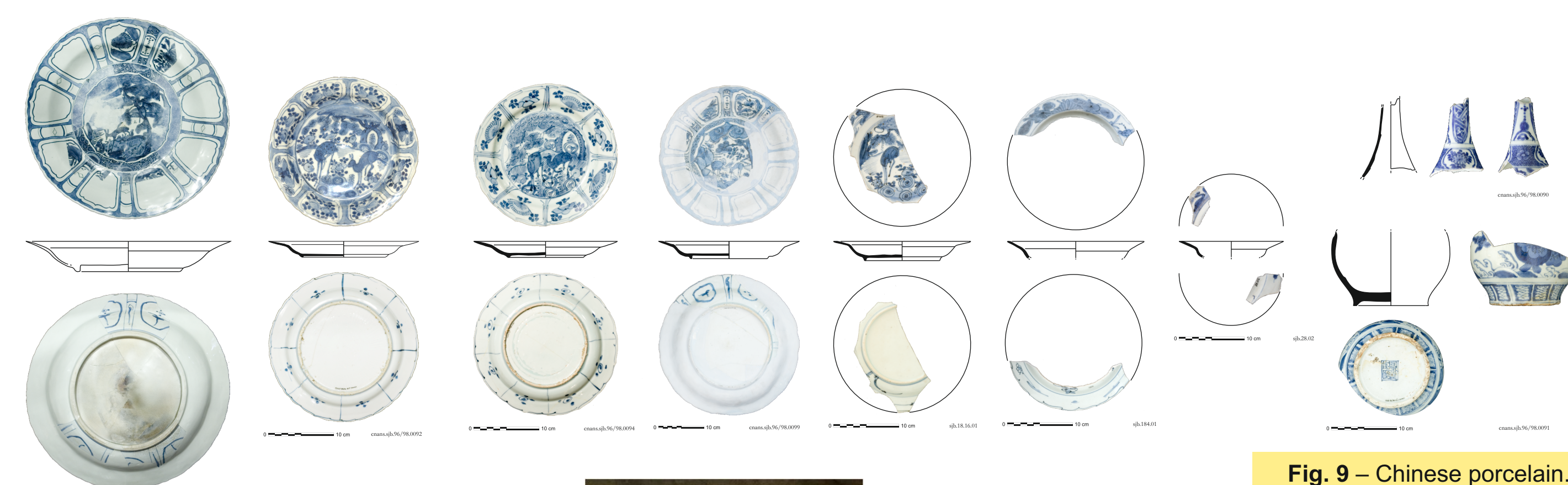


Fig. 9 – Chinese porcelain.

The dishes offers the most distinguish innovation of kraakporcelain, consisting in the interior rim, the cavetto and the foliated lip rim being treated as a single unit divided into panels and separated by bands alternately filled with symbols depicting the prosperity and flowers (Fig. 11).

Fig. 11 – Still life. William Kalf, 1669.

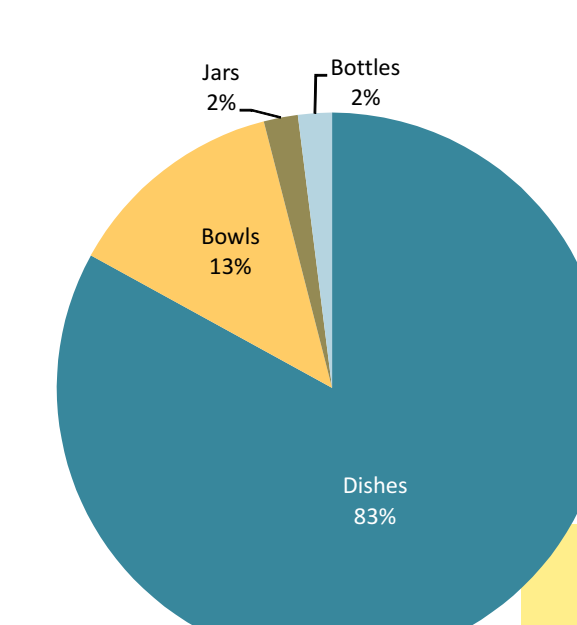


Fig. 10 – Statistical analyses for the Chinese porcelain forms.

Usually, central decoration of kraak displays landscapes with moving deers, insects, and birds, plant motifs sometimes along the cliffs and lagoons landscapes (Matos&Salgado, 2002). Four variants of rims were also identified (Fig. 12) and four types of centre/flats (Fig. 13). The most represented are the variant B and the type I.

Variant A - Simple panels separated by decorated bands of beaded pendants		23%
Variant B - Mould pattern of large panels, separated by decorated bands of beaded pendants		35%
Variant C - Simple panels separated by water bands		11%
Variant D - Band bounded by two concentric lines with decoration inside		31%

Fig. 12 – Typological analyses of the rims.

Type I - Round medallion consisting of two concentric bands		70%
Type II - Simple		3%
Type III - Decorated panels		9%
Type IV - Decorated panels separated by ruyi heads.		18%

Fig. 13 – Typological analyses of the centre/flats.

## Discussion

In Portugal, with the opening of the India Run the trade of rare commodities assumed large proportions, and step in the urban space. Through them, we witness the change of the daily life, habits and customs of the early modern Portuguese society.

The Portuguese were the first to participate in the kraakporcelain maritime trade. Their active involvement is well documented through the archaeological finds of some ships that sunk in their return journey: *Santo Alberto*, 1593; *Nossa Senhora da Luz*, 1615; *São Gonçalo*, 1630; *Santa Maria de Madre Deus*, 1643 or the ships *Nossa Senhora da Atalaia do Pinheiro* and *Santíssimo Sacramento*, both in 1647.

Therefore, these materials attests the commercial activity carried out at that time, revealing the interest for utilitarian objects, especially tableware, even if some of them may also have had a decorative function.

In a small scale, the collection from SJB reveals good quality on its stylistic and manufacturing conception and its representative of the main types of porcelains acquired and consumed in Portugal. The examples are several, occurring in coastal cities, such as Lisbon and Porto, or in Portugal inner cities like Évora, under convents, palaces or wealthier classes contexts. They also appear in Portuguese museum collections as the Casa-Museu Dr. Anastácio Gonçalves, the Fundação Carmona e Costa, the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (Lisbon, Portugal), as well as a room of Santos Palace with an entirely roof covered with porcelain, where we can also find similar artifacts.

This collection is also similar to the ones recorded internationally, in Europe or in the colonial territories occupied by the Spanish (Canepa, 2012), corresponding to a mature phase of commerce and consumption of Chinese porcelain. They have been found in several Portuguese wrecks such as the *Espírito Santo* (1608), the *Nossa Senhora da Luz* (1615), the *São Gonçalo* (1630) and the *Santa Maria de Madre Deus* (1643); in VOC ships as *Mauritius* (1609), *Banda* (1615) and *Witte Leeuw* (1613); and in Spanish ships as *San Felipe* (1576); o *San Diego* (1600); o *Santa Margarita* (1601) e a *Nuestra Señora de la Limpia y Pura Concepción* (1638) and in the Ming collections preserved in Paris (Guimet Museum), Persia (Ardebil) and Turkey (Topkapi Saray Museum).

## Conclusions

The oriental jars and the Chinese porcelain would have their finally destiny in the Lisbon port – centre of consumption and distribution for other rare commodities from Asian markets.

The oriental jars would be used to transport and packaging foodstuffs, liquids and certain cargos. Once it was recovered a large quantity of pepper grains disperse among several architectural parts of the ship, some of the jars might have been used to transport this spice.

The Chinese porcelain it's the most represented group. The most common forms are dishes, bowls, jars and bottles of good quality, mostly belonging to the group of porcelains known as kraakporcelain, produced in Jingdezhen workshops, and used worldwide at the time of the last voyage of *Nossa Senhora dos Mártires*.

## References

- AAVV (1998) – *Nossa Senhora dos Mártires. The last voyage*. Lisboa, Pavilhão de Portugal/Expo'98 e Editorial Verbo.
- ALVES, F. J. S. (1995) – *Projecto S. Julião da Barra – Projecto de Arqueologia Subaquática – Relatório dos Trabalhos Efectuados em 1994*. Lisboa.
- CANEPA, T. (2012) – “The Portuguese and Spanish Trade in Kraak Porcelain in the Late 16th and Early 17th Centuries”. In *Proceedings of the International Symposium: Chinese Export Ceramics in the 16th and 17th Centuries and the Spread of Material Civilization*. Hong Kong, Chinese Civilization Centre Press, pp. 257-285.
- CASTRO, L.F. (2001) – “The remains of a Portuguese Indiaman at the mouth of the Tagus, Lisbon, Portugal (*Nossa Senhora dos Mártires*, 1606?)”. In *Internacional Symposium on Archaeology of Medieval and Modern Ships of Iberian-Atlantic Tradition*. Trabalhos de Arqueologia 18, Lisboa, IPA, pp. 381-403.
- COELHO, I.P. (2008) – *A cerâmica oriental da Carreira da Índia no contexto da carga de uma nau - a presumível Nossa Senhora dos Mártires*. Master thesis presented to the Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa.
- MATOS, M.A.P. (1998) – “Porcelana Chinesa – De presente régio a produto comercial”. In *Caminhos da Porcelana – Dinastia Ming e Qing*. Lisboa, Fundação Oriente, pp. 93-108.
- MATOS, M.A.P. and Salgado, M. (2002) – *Porcelana Chinesa da Fundação Carmona e Costa*. Lisboa, Assírio & Alvim.
- PINTO, M.H.M. (1993) – *Biombos Namban*. Lisboa, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga.

## Acknowledgments

The authress thanks to Dra. Maria Antónia Pinto de Matos (Director of the Museu Nacional do Azulejo, Lisbon, Portugal) and to Centro de Arqueologia Náutica e Subaquática da Direcção-Geral do Património Cultural, Lisbon, Portugal.